

# **Exhibit 13**

## Message

**From:** Tholen, Elaine V (School Board Member) [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=16F0DCDB679749DE970D3D318F8466F4-THOLEN, ELA]  
**Sent:** 8/14/2020 1:13:00 PM  
**To:** Molloy, Michael A. [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a880180da65747948292bc1a541804fe-Molloy, Mic]  
**Subject:** Fw: [External] Re: Concerns Related to TJHSST Admissions - from a TJ Parent

Hi--you might want to see this too--just came in...

**Elaine Tholen**  
**School Board Member, Dranesville**

*Empowering Our Students for Tomorrow*

571-423-1087

Please be aware that correspondence with School Board members is subject to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This means that your correspondence may be made public if (1) it deals with FCPS business and (2) someone requests it. Only a few topics are exempt from disclosure such as information about identifiable students and personnel information about individual employees.

**From:** Qarni, Atif <atif.qarni@governor.virginia.gov>

**Sent:** Friday, August 14, 2020 8:50 AM

**To:** **FERPA**

**Cc:** Superintendent Brabrand <suptbrabrand@fcps.edu>; Keys-Gamarra, Karen A (School Board Member) <kakeysgamarr@fcps.edu>; Bolling, Michael <michael.bolling@doe.virginia.gov>; Donna Poland <Donna.Poland@doe.virginia.gov>; BOE@doe.virginia.gov <BOE@doe.virginia.gov>; district39@senate.virginia.gov <district39@senate.virginia.gov>; Senate District10 <district10@senate.virginia.gov>; district02@senate.virginia.gov <district02@senate.virginia.gov>; district36@senate.virginia.gov <district36@senate.virginia.gov>; Lamont Bagby <DelLBagby@house.virginia.gov>; DelDBulova@house.virginia.gov <DelDBulova@house.virginia.gov>; Elizabeth Guzman <DelEGuzman@house.virginia.gov>; Mark L Keam <DelMKeam@house.virginia.gov>; Genevieve Siegel-Hawley <gsiegelhawle@vcu.edu>; Dr. Michael Gill <mgill@hcps.us>; Bonitatibus, Ann N <anbonitatibu@fcps.edu>; district35@senate.virginia.gov <district35@senate.virginia.gov>; Frances Bradford <Fran.Bradford@governor.virginia.gov>; Hala Al-tinawi <hala.al-tinawi@governor.virginia.gov>; Victoria Noles <victoria.noles@governor.virginia.gov>; Omeish, Abrar (School Board Member) <aomeish@fcps.edu>; Sizemore Heizer, Rachna (School Board Member) <rsizemorehei@fcps.edu>; McLaughlin, Megan (School Board Member) <momclaughlin@fcps.edu>; Meren, Melanie K (School Board Member) <mkmeren@fcps.edu>; Derenak Kaufax, Tamara (School Board Member) <tderenakkauf@fcps.edu>; Anderson, Ricardy J (School Board Member) <rjanderson@fcps.edu>; Corbett Sanders, Karen (School Board Member) <kicorbettsan@fcps.edu>; Frisch, Karl V (School Board Member) <kvfrisch@fcps.edu>; Cohen, Laura Jane H (School Board Member) <lhcohen@fcps.edu>; Pekarsky, Stella G (School Board Member) <sgpekarsky@fcps.edu>; Tholen, Elaine V (School Board Member) <evtholen@fcps.edu>; district32@senate.virginia.gov <district32@senate.virginia.gov>; DelRSullivan@house.virginia.gov <DelRSullivan@house.virginia.gov>; Luke Huan <lukej.huan@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** [External] Re: Concerns Related to TJHSST Admissions - from a TJ Parent

Dear **FERPA**

Thank you so much for your thoughtful email.

The goal since day one for the Northam Administration has been to identify the inequities and systemic barriers in all parts of our society and address them head on. The Governor brought me into

Defendant's Exhibit

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this position right out of the classroom to bring a fresh teacher perspective to assess the entire PK-20 education continuum and identify the inequities and find holistic solutions. Addressing enrollment and admission policies at our Governor Schools in Virginia are only one small part of the overall plan to address inequities in our education which have plagued us for decades.

The last three years, our office has actively worked on improving our systems by investing in early childhood education; making historic investments in at-risk and most vulnerable students; funding for more ELL teachers; focusing on the Bio-Psycho-Social needs; funding for more school counselors; addressing basic insecurities i.e. food, housing, transportation, childcare; funding more need based financial aid; workforce development and tuition free community college; in state tuition for undocumented students; creating an inclusive history and social studies curriculum; revamping our professional development to make it more culturally responsive and inclusive, etc.

In addition to this we became the first state to implement Computer Science Standards in our PK-12 system. Currently through state funding over 2,000 teachers get professional development to get certified in teaching at various levels of CS every year. When Amazon arrival was announced, the Governor's office in partnership with our state legislature created a Tech Talent Fund to bolster CS degree attainment. Majority of the Tech Talent fund goes to our Community Colleges and Universities. However, we also used the fund and created an annual grant for CS education for PK-12.

Two years ago the Governor also established a STEM Education Commission based out of my Secretariat. This Commission is made up of PK-12 and Higher Education educators, students, school board members, parents, business community, STEM experts, etc. They have been mapping all the in-school and after school STEM programs and have come up with Robust set of recommendations to address the inequities in STEM education. Some of these recommendations are already starting to get implemented.

We also implemented a new Standards of Accreditation for our K-12 schools transitioning from a high stakes testing culture to a culture focused on project based learning and a system that would utilize performance assessments. In this process a Profile of a Virginia Graduate was created which focuses on the 5Cs. We want our students to be able to think creatively and critically, be able to collaborate and communicate effectively, and become community minded citizens.

I've leaned heavily on local divisions to start thinking about:

- reviewing and revamping code of conduct and disciplinary policies to make them less punitive. There is implicit and explicit bias that is factored into these practices and policies. Black students in Fairfax and in Virginia receive disproportionately more discipline referrals and suspensions compared to other students. This has an impact on students ability to get into gifted programs.
- grading policies which currently are not based solely on content knowledge – they can include behavior, participation and other subjective measures, which can place students of color at a distinct disadvantage. This has an impact on students ability to get into gifted programs.
- school boundaries which are gerrymandered based on affluent families (vs. non-affluent families) and single-family homes (vs. multifamily housing). We have to identify that for what it is—segregation by color and class. This has an impact on students ability to get into gifted programs.

I have visited hundreds of schools in Virginia and it has become abundantly clear to me that when it comes to enrichment, specialty programs, gifted programs, AP classes, etc. children of non-affluent families and children of Black and Hispanic families are at a huge disadvantage. These inequities continue on into higher education.

Our gifted programs are fragmented and there is inconsistency on how school divisions assess students for gifted and specialty programs. Our State Board of Education is planning to open up our gifted regulations and come up with evidence based solutions. They undertook a similar process the last two years as they updated the Standards of Quality to prescribe and improve our at-risk add on to a more robust Equity Fund; update evidence based ratios for school counselors, ELL teachers, specialized support staff ratio for nurses, social workers, psychologists; create a standard for teacher and teacher mentorship programs, etc. Some of these items were funded, and I remain hopeful that our state will fully fund all of the updated Standards of Quality in the coming years. Last year the Governor School Directors in Virginia wrote me a letter asking for the state to increase add on funding they get directly from the state. The state sends nearly \$7.5 Billion each year to local divisions in Direct Aid, this funding along with whatever is spent by localities is sent to Governor Schools. Because our Academic Governor Schools pay their teachers a higher salary, have smaller class sizes, etc. they receive additional funding. Even though there is no federal mandate for gifted education, specialty programs or elite schools, we still have funded these programs well. On top of what Governor schools receive from the state and locality, they also get an add on. This add on had not received an increase in the past three administrations. Governor schools requested that the add on be increased from \$12.2M to \$16.6M. For TJHSST that would mean an increase from \$2.6M to \$3.5M in the add on. That is a very large sum just for an add on for one school.

When Governor's School Directors reached out to me for more funds, like with any other request I asked my staff to do our due diligence. In our review we found out that Diversity based on multiple variables is a huge problem at our two largest Governor's Schools of TJHSST and Maggie Walker. As a result of the review, Governor and General Assembly did honor the new funding request to increase the annual amount for the add on, however, we added the below language to the budget bill:

*"Each Academic Year Governor's schools shall set diversity goals for its student body and faculty, and develop a plan to meet said goals in collaboration with community partners at public meetings. Each school shall submit a report to the Governor by October 1 of each year on its goals and status of implementing its plan. The report shall include, but not be limited to the following: utilization of universal screenings in feeder divisions; admission processes in place or under consideration that promote access for historically under-served students; and outreach and communication efforts deployed to recruit historically under-served students. The report shall include the racial/ethnic make-up and socioeconomic diversity of its students, faculty, and applicants."*

This addition to the budget bill was a first step. As a second step, I met with all the Directors of the Governor Schools to hear their ideas. As a third step, I've brought this work group together to help me think through what policy I will advance forward.

The TJ principal, a TJ student, an FCPS School Board member, FCPS Superintendent and several General Assembly members from Fairfax and NoVA are in this group. Your fellow Coalition members have grossly mischaracterized this work group as not being inclusive or lacking transparency. There are more people representing TJ in the work group than any other Governor's School.

As a cabinet member, I have the authority to bring together work groups to help me think through what policy I want to put together for the Governor to consider. I hear ideas on numerous issues from individuals and groups on a daily basis. For example with COVID-19 Pandemic, we have numerous small and large work groups advising cabinet Secretaries on numerous issues daily.

I find it highly inappropriate that some of your fellow Coalition members have tried to bully and slander members of this work group. It was also brought to my attention that one of your fellow Coalition members is associated with people and a group that was declared a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The correspondence I received from your Coalition is full of hate and deceit. One of your coalition members used an email account falsely representing TJ PTSA. Some of your Coalition members have bullied and slandered members of the FCPS school board and FCPS Superintendent who have tried to address the various inequities I listed above. Some of your Coalition members have bullied and slandered TJ administration in trying to address the inequities that exist in our schools, our gifted programs and with the antiquated admission policy at TJ.

Our Commonwealth has invested heavily in our elite schools and universities. However, many students are not able to take advantage of our investments because of our antiquated admission policies which are heavily focused on standardized testing and arbitrary merits. In my opinion, this is in conflict with our Profile of VA Graduate and our Standards of Accreditation that were recently implemented.

Addressing admission policies at Governor's Schools is not being done in a vacuum. Similar efforts are underway from my Secretariat to work with our institutions of Higher Education. Many Institutions of higher education are transitioning away from a standardized test to a holistic approach, assessing the entire Profile of a Student. By doing the same at TJ will only make the school better.

Some of your Coalition members have made outrageous claims that state and local efforts are Anti-Asian. Asian community is not monolithic. Many children from Asian working-class families are also not benefiting from Governor Schools, specialty and gifted programs. I find these claims disheartening: especilaly because I am Muslim, an Immigrant, and an Asian American who has faced racism and understand the challenges of marginalzied groups. It is disturbing to see your Coalition members making this about Asian versus Blacks and Hispanic families. The correspondence I've seen from your Coalition and the rhetoric some of your Coalition members are using is just like rhetoric of white supremaciets and hate groups. I don't believe this Coalition is representative of the Greater TJ, Fairfax, or Northern VA Community.

I will not be meeting with this Coalition or certain members of this Coalition due to the reasons I listed above.

However, I am willing to set up a virtual meeting with you. Your email was thoughtful. And, I'd be happy to set up a time with you and other thoughtful TJ families like yourself to hear their perspective and ideas.

In the meantime please reflect on the following. Last year our Institutions of Higher Education in Virginia were ranked #1 by CNBC. Rankings for colleges, universities and K-12 schools are usually done in limited ways and are not holistic in their approach. Nevertheless, I realize many people value them. The two questions I asked our University and College Presidents were: What did we sacrifice to get to number 1? and, Did we do it the right way?

You can email me directly to set up a time.

Best Regards,

Atif Qarni  
Secretary of Education  
Commonwealth of Virginia

On Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 3:01 AM FERPA wrote:  
Dear Secretary Qarni and other policy makers and lawmakers,

My name is **FERPA** I write to you to share my story as a TJ parent and express my concerns about the proposed changes to TJ admissions.

# FERPA

**FERPA** interest in math and science started very early. My husband and I did our part to support him by standing by and letting him choose what he wants to work on. The privilege we had and we gave him is our encouragement and our help when he needs it. I understand that there are brilliant kids who may not have the same supporting environment, and I think that one way the state and the FCPS board can help is to expand and widen the identification of academically accelerated students from early on and build the environment that promotes and supports academic excellence.

I am concerned that the discussion of the task force is not transparent and the proposed changes might not be a good solution to achieve diversity at TJ. Please read a petition by 1,500+ supports of Coalition for TJ: <https://bit.ly/Coalition4TJPetition>.

You can reach me at **FERPA** I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,

**FERPA**